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Tutor-Facilitated Digital Literacy Acquisition in
Hard-to-Serve Populations: A Research Project

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Learners: Development of Self-Confidence

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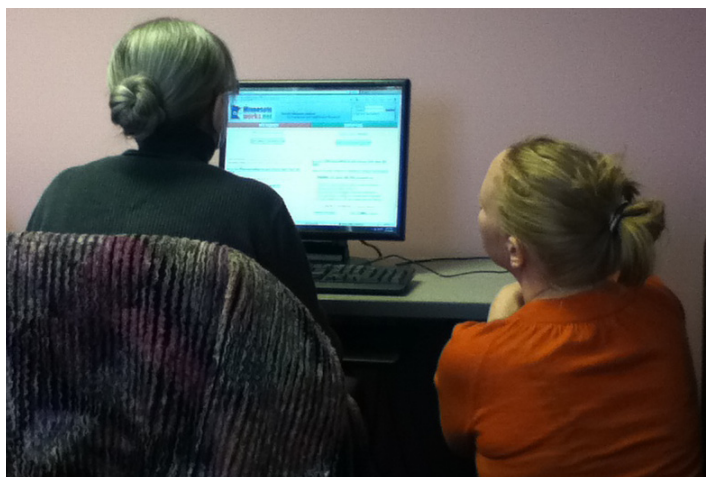
Development of Self-confidence

Digital Literacy Acquisition in Brief: *What Research Tells Us about Learners*

Overview

These findings are from an Institute of Museum and Library Services funded research project that interviewed more than 100 participants within a multi-state Broadband Technology Opportunities Program (BTOP) Sustainable Broadband Adoption (SBA) project. The BTOP project included six lead partners who developed local networks of community organizations to provide adults with an opportunity to learn to use computers and the Internet.

While these networks created a variety of implementation strategies and ways to serve learners' needs, they shared these key features:



- *curriculum on the Learner Web, an online platform designed specifically for adult learners, which included digital literacy material in English and Spanish*
- *in-person tutor support*
- *the opportunity to work at their own pace and identify their own goals*



Development of Self-confidence

Key Discoveries

For many adults with low digital literacy skills, the process of tutor-facilitated, self-paced digital skills training contributed to a strengthened sense of self-confidence.

Vulnerable adult populations are more likely to experience barriers to digital access as a direct result of poverty and limited access to education. Lack of experience with and exposure to technology can lead to feelings of fear and anxiety of using computers and the Internet.

However, computer anxiety can be overcome through positive experiences with digital technology. As adults gained facility with digital literacy skills, the accomplishment gave them a sense of self-confidence, which resulted in the incorporation of these skills into their everyday lives. Using their newly acquired skills on a day-to-day basis contributed to improved skills and lead to the setting and discovering of new goals. This improved sense of self-confidence also appeared to have a positive impact in other areas of their lives.

Tutor support built learner self-confidence:

- By building relationships with learners, tutors became allies to learners who felt embarrassed or discouraged by their low skill level. Encouragement and nurturing support offered by tutors was vital for making learners feel comfortable enough to learn the material.
- Through repeated interactions with the same learner, tutors gained an understanding of their skill level and encouraged them to try things they knew the learner was capable of on their own. At the same time the tutor presence served as a safety net in case the learner became stuck or hit a roadblock. As a result, adult learners pushed themselves to go further and gained independence. This ultimately bolstered the learner's sense of self-confidence.

Voices from the Field

"When you learn something that you thought was impossible, of course it changes your life because when it gives you confidence you can reach anything."

~ Bilingual Learner



"I'm not afraid anymore. I can go and ask for any job that I have to use the computer without saying, 'I don't know that.' So it changed my life, now I feel brave..."

~ Learner

Development of Self-confidence

Key Discoveries

Increased self-confidence was important for further digital literacy acquisition:

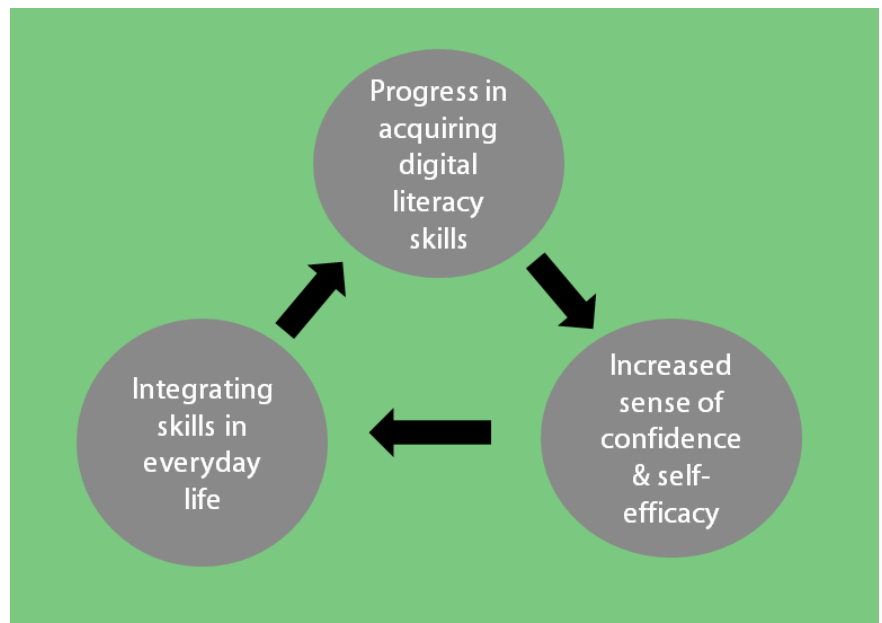
On the Ground

Tutors reported how learners changed over the course of their participation in the program. As one tutor said,

"It's just incredible to see someone who was so afraid of the computer to finally utilize it. And feel comfortable and look forward to using it. They use it as tools in their lives now. Emailing, filling out job applications, studying for the GED. I mean this is something that petrified them at first, but you know, breaking it down into little bits helped... and now they love using it. I love introducing them to it."

- Developing digital skills provided adults with tangible success and progress which contributed to the development of a sense of self-confidence.
- An increased level of self-confidence empowered the adults to become independent learners and often resulted in the incorporation of digital literacy skills into their everyday lives. Using digital literacy skills on a day-to-day basis then contributed to skill improvement and setting and discovering new goals for learning.
- An increased level of self-confidence appeared to have significant impact on other areas of adults lives such as reducing feelings of social isolation or improving their motivation and ability to find and maintain employment:

"I feel confident now when I see these machines in my office that I didn't see before. And I think that relays to my people too. My clients, customers. I have the box sitting here, and I know what to do with it." ~ Learner, Business Owner, and Octogenarian



Development of Self-confidence

What Do These Findings Mean For Your Work?

A small success leads to more success and more self-confidence. That seems obvious, but so many people who are struggling have experienced very little success in traditional education settings. This points out how important it is that we ensure that those small successes happen in our digital literacy programs.

~ Program Administrator



Acknowledgements & Further Information

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More information about the project, research findings, publications, and project data can be found in PDX Scholar at:

http://pdxscholar.library.pdx.edu/digital_literacy_acquisition/

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Digital Literacy Acquisition in Brief: What Research Tells Us about...

Language Learners

- Tutors' Perspectives
- The Role of Online Materials
- The Learner/Tutor Relationship
- Learners' Perspectives

Program Design

- Tutor-facilitated Digital Literacy Acquisition
- The Learner Path
- Volunteering in a Digital Literacy Program
- Learning Digital Skills in a Time-limited Program
- Learning Digital Skills in a Corrections Setting

Tutors

- Personal Qualities of Tutors
- Tutoring Strategies and Organizing Learning
- The Tutor/Learner Relationship

Learners

- Development of Self-confidence
- Measuring Success
- Impact
- Learners Who Become Tutors
- Self-paced Learning